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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUENOS AIRES 000787

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [OAS](#) [HO](#) [AR](#)

SUBJECT: ARGENTINE PRESIDENT CFK RETURNS EMPTY-HANDED FROM  
HER CENTRAL AMERICAN JAUNT

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 0757

[1](#)B. BUENOS AIRES 0756 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)C. 08 BUENOS AIRES 0014

Classified By: CDA Tom Kelly for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de  
Kirchner (CFK) returned to Buenos Aires July 6 from a 60-hour  
trip that took her to Washington and El Salvador in a failed  
attempt to restore Manuel Zelaya to the presidency of  
Honduras. In El Salvador, CFK argued that she was on a  
mission to defend democracy and human rights by nipping an  
unseemly coup in the bud. While a visceral aversion to  
military coups undoubtedly influenced this voyage, her  
insistence on pressing to make it happen despite advice to  
the contrary from the MFA suggests that she sought to push  
her husband's recent electoral debacle off the front pages  
with an audacious diplomatic gambit. At home, however, CFK's  
foray into shuttle diplomacy has yielded her little more than  
criticism. End summary.

MFA ADVISED CFK NOT TO TRAVEL  
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[1](#)2. (C) Embassy was advised evening of July 3, during its  
Independence Day reception, that CFK was departing that  
evening for Washington. The previous evening, the MFA U/S  
for Latin America, Agustin Colombo-Sierra, had told the CDA  
that CFK's travel was not imminent, and that CFK would not  
leave for Honduras until there was a settlement in place.  
Colombo-Sierra had just spoken with Foreign Minister Taiana,  
who was presiding over the special OAS sessions on the  
Honduran situation in Washington, and was repeating advice  
that Taiana himself was giving to CFK (and which he  
erroneously believed would be heeded). He said the  
settlement should be based on Zelaya's reinstatement; a  
suspension of Zelaya's planned referendum on reelection; and  
an amnesty for all those who participated in Zelaya's ouster.  
The CDA warned Colombo that the GOA should not expect  
high-level meetings for CFK in Washington over the Fourth of  
July weekend.

[1](#)3. (C) Colombo also said that Taiana had commented to him  
that he was working well with the USG and Canada, but the  
Latinos were very fractious. Taiana had complained to him  
about the machinations of Chavez and other Bolivarian  
leaders.

CFK PLUNGES AHEAD  
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[1](#)4. (C) CFK arrived in Washington July 4 with Justice Minister  
Anibal Fernandez in time to attend the special OAS session  
that culminated in the suspension of Honduras from the OAS.  
(We understand that Argentina resisted attempts to push the  
OAS session back a day to July 5, suggesting CFK's  
anxiousness to get on with the show.) On the morning of July  
5, she reportedly huddled in Washington with Ecuadorian

President Correa, Paraguayan President Lugo, Honduran President Zelaya, and UNGA President Miguel D'Escoto, and they agreed that the South American presidents would fly to El Salvador aboard CFK's plane, Tango One, while Zelaya would attempt to return to Honduras.

15. (SBU) CFK landed in El Salvador with Correa and Insulza on July 5. Zelaya joined them after the de facto authorities in Honduras denied him permission to land and after stopping in Managua. At a joint press conference, CFK said, "In the name of the presidents, I want to take my solidarity to those who today have suffered repression. My country had one of the region's bloodiest dictatorships, ergo my solidarity. That's why reacting against what is happening in Honduras is not just in defense of a president."

16. (SBU) CFK argued that she was "fulfilling the mandate of human rights and the people's will," that the mission had not been "a failure but a great success because it had restored the value of multilateralism to defend institutions, in a world which had become unilateral." She said, "Let's not think just in tactical terms right now. Let's think strategically...What today may look like a failure, tomorrow may be a success. That is the conviction I have about how one must think in political terms. It's to never consider oneself defeated and to have strategies that differ from the shrill or highflown."

#### PRESS REACTION SCATHING

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17. (SBU) Almost as soon as the press started reporting that CFK had accepted a June 28 invitation from Zelaya and/or

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Insulza to accompany the deposed leader back to Honduras, CFK was the target of critics who questioned the wisdom of her foray. Under the headline "The President Goes Where She is Not Needed," Joaquin Morales-Sola, one of Argentina's most influential columnists, wrote on page one of "La Nacion" July 6 that the "serious presidents of Latin America" (Chile's Bachelet, Brazil's Lula, Mexico's Calderon, Colombia's Uribe, and Uruguay's Vazquez) "left the management of this conflict in the hands of international institutions," CFK took an exceptionally hands-on, high-profile role in the incident, even though "she is perhaps, among all of them, the one who is governing with the greatest difficulties."

18. (C) As did many other commentators, Morales-Sola in "La Nacion" also recalled the parallels to former president Nestor Kirchner's and FM Taiana's ill-advised participation (ref C) in December 2007 as "guarantors" of Hugo Chavez's failed "Operation Emmanuel" effort in Colombia to secure from the FARC "the release of a child who had not been kidnapped."

There were some more generous comments, such as that of dissident Peronist leader Felipe Sola, who suggested the President's efforts were well-intended and should be given the benefit of the doubt. Largest-circulation daily newspaper "Clarín" ran an op-ed column by Marcelo Cantelmi claiming the actions in Honduras were masterminded by a right-wing cabal in Washington and that "Hugo Chavez made no mistake this time when he warned that this coup was aimed much higher, at Barack Obama."

#### COMMENT: THE WORLD: NOT THE K'S SPECIALTY

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19. (C) Comment: From all accounts, CFK decided on the spot to accept Zelaya's invitation (ref A) that she received the day after her government's big electoral defeat to escort him back to Honduras, impulsively committing herself and the GOA to a "plan" that from the outset seemed unlikely to succeed. As CFK's political career was forged in the struggle against Argentina's military regime in the 1970s, it seems credible that her visceral aversion to military coups influenced this voyage. Without doubt, though, there was more to the story.

CFK received good advice from her Foreign Ministry to not travel to Central America without a pre-cooked deal. She ignored that guidance, and the Argentine delegation to the OAS, presumably acting under Casa Rosada's instruction, subsequently refused to delay the OAS session to July 5. All of this suggests that CFK's real motivation was to push her husband's recent electoral debacle off the front pages of Buenos Aires's weekend newspapers with an audacious diplomatic gambit. It didn't work, on several levels. In that sense, this episode was another indication of the Kirchners' foreign policy ineptitude, as they -- yet again -- opportunistically sought short-term gains from a situation without obtaining all the facts or considering all the risks.

KELLY